

Indiana Department of Environmental Management

Lori F. Kaplan, Commissioner

Ozone Action Days

Practice at the track, camping trips to Turkey Run and swimming on the shores of the Indiana Dunes are sure signs that summer is here for Hoosiers.

But with the arrival of fun in the sun, summer brings a season within a season. Between May 1 and September 30, Indiana's official "ozone season" is in full gear. Ozone season is the time of year when conditions are favorable for the formation of high levels of ground-level ozone, particularly during hot, stagnant days across Indiana.

It's important that as neighbors, we work together to reduce this pollution that adversely affects our families, friends and communities. High levels of ozone can pose significant health risks to the elderly, young children and people with pre-existing lung ailments, but even healthy adults may be affected.

Ground-level ozone is pollution formed by a chemical reaction between volatile organic compounds (VOCs) and nitrogen oxides (NOx) in the presence of sunlight and warm temperatures. The primary sources of VOCs and NOx are automobiles and industrial emissions. Closer to home, household emitters of these pollutants include lawn mowers, barbecue grills and gasoline-powered yard tools.

While the Indiana Department of Environmental Management (IDEM) continues to work with businesses that emit these pollutants and find ways to reduce those emissions, it's important that each of us, as individuals, flex our own power to improve Indiana's air quality.

As residents, we can all contribute to the reduction of ground-level ozone by making minor changes in our daily routines. Did you know that our automobiles contribute approximately 50 percent of the pollution that contributes to ground-level ozone?

By reducing the amount of traveling we do, we reduce the amount of pollution each of us contributes. Carpooling, taking the bus or riding a bike are all efficient ways of travel and are environmentally friendly. Also, by keeping our automobiles in good operating shape through tune-ups and maintenance checks, we improve gas mileage and car performance, which in turn reduces vehicle emissions.

It's also important that when we work around the house, we are aware that our everyday activities can contribute to pollution. For example, some household cleaners, paint, workshop chemical solvents and garden chemicals contain VOCs. It's important we properly use, seal, store and dispose of these products. Even the use of gas grills as opposed to charcoal and lighter fluid makes for cleaner air.

The importance of these changes will help reduce not only ground-level ozone in general, but the number of "Ozone Action Days" a community may have. Ozone Action Days are called when weather forecasts combined with air quality data gathered from 38 state and local air monitors predict that the

amount of ground-level ozone will pose a health risk. These are days when it is especially important to do our share for cleaner air.

On Ozone Action Days, it's very important that we work together to reduce pollution. Tips such as not filling up for gas or at least waiting until after 6 p.m. to do so, reducing unnecessary car trips and limiting the use of combustion engines can play a big role in helping fellow Hoosiers breathe better during these days.

Residents can find out when Ozone Action Days are predicted by calling 1-800-631-2871. You may also sign up for free e-mail notification of Ozone Action Days at this Web address. These means will provide up-to-date forecasts for ground-level ozone for seven regions throughout the state. IDEM also announces Ozone Action Days through local newspapers, television and radio.

As you can see, minor changes in our daily lives can have a major impact on Hoosier air quality. By each of us doing our share, we can help others and ourselves breathe cleaner, fresher air this summer. So as we plan the family vacations, the summer campouts and the backyard barbecues, let's be aware of the threats ozone presents and our ability to reduce them. It's important for our our state, our health and our environment.